UNITED
NATIONS

CERD

International Convention on
the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination

Distr.
GENERAL

CERD/C/SR.1519
15 April 2002

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1519th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 20 March 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. DIACONU

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ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS AND METHODS OF WORK (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS AND METHODS OF WORK (agenda item 4) (continued) (E/C.12/2000/6; two documents without a symbol, in English only; CERD/C/60/Misc.39).

1. The CHAIRMAN asked Mr. Valencia Rodríguez to report on the meetings of the working group on the working methods of the Committee.

2. Mr. VALENCIA RODRÍGUEZ said that there had been three meetings of the working group, which had been attended by most of the members of the Committee. Five areas discussed required further consideration. The first had to do with the introduction of country reports by delegations of States parties. In his view, the Committee should remind delegations of their guidelines so that, in their oral introduction, they explained the scope of the report and updated the information contained therein, but did not enter into matters outside the purview of the Convention. The delegation usually had 30 minutes for its oral introduction.

3. The second issue taken up had to do with country rapporteurs, who should refer only to questions dealt with in the country report or related to the Convention and have a time limit of 30 minutes, in keeping with past practice. The speaking time of the other members of the Committee should be limited to 10 minutes and their comments should likewise be of relevance to the report and the Convention. The time limit would be flexible, depending on the importance of the subject matter under consideration. In some of the other treaty bodies, country rapporteurs could submit their questions to delegations in advance so that they could prepare their replies. That was not Committee practice, but was at the discretion of the country rapporteur. It had been tried once and the results had not been satisfactory.

4. Many country reports were very long and did not address questions covered by the Convention. The Committee might consider whether it should invite States parties to ensure that their country reports did not exceed 50 pages.

5. A third question discussed had been the follow-up by States parties to the Committee's observations and recommendations. The widest possible publicity should be given to the initial country report and the Committee's observations and recommendations in order to solicit the reactions of civil society. The next report should then inform the Committee what measures had been taken to follow up its observations and recommendations. If that information was not provided, the delegation could be asked to submit it.

6. The style of country reports varied considerably. Some were general and others were detailed. It might be useful for their style to be reviewed and standardized as much as possible.

7. When the comments of States parties were very extensive, the Committee had adopted the approach of asking for a summary, to be published in the annual report to the General Assembly.

8. A fourth question discussed had been States parties whose reports were excessively overdue. The Committee's procedure had been to adopt decisions and draw the General Assembly's attention to such cases so that it could take any action deemed appropriate. The Chairman of the Committee also wrote to State parties which did not fulfil their reporting obligations.

9. The fifth area requiring further consideration involved early warning measures and urgent action procedures. The Committee had set standards to be applied in that regard. The choice of cases gave rise to problems: any member of the Committee could submit a case or situation which he or she thought should be the subject of early warning measures and urgent action procedures. The Committee should decide how to improve the procedures and make them more flexible.

10. A meeting of the chairpersons of treaty bodies was to be held in several weeks. He suggested that the meeting might discuss ways of regulating relations between the treaty bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the preparation of a text on the submission of concluding observations and recommendations by treaty bodies, recommendations for the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by all treaty bodies and measures to combat terrorism and protect human rights.

11. The Committee had received a document entitled inter-Committee meeting on methods of work relating to the State reporting process (document without a symbol, in English only). The Committee should appoint two members to attend the meeting with the Chairman.

12. At the three meetings of the working group, special consideration had been given to the Committee's relations with NGOs. Most participants had not been in favour of a pre-sessional meeting to hear information from NGOs, endorsing instead the idea of spending the first day or day and a half on giving NGOs the opportunity to submit material and make comments of relevance to the country reports to be considered at that session. The secretariat had been asked about the practice of the other treaty bodies and the Committee had just received a document entitled "Treaty bodies and participation of non-governmental organizations: comparative study" (document without a symbol, in English only) and another on NGO participation in the activities of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/2000/6). All the treaty bodies had a pre-sessional working group. Some of them, such as the working groups of the Human Rights Committee or the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, received information from NGOs and, in the latter case, NGOs could give information and participate in formal meetings. Of course, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reported to the Economic and Social Council and thus had a system which differed from that of the other treaty bodies. The practice of allowing NGOs to attend the first day of the Committee's work might require a change in its rules of procedure. Before deciding on whether or not to do so, it should be borne in mind that that would not be possible until the session of March 2003, since a thematic meeting was scheduled for a day and a half at the August 2002 session. It should also be noted that not all NGOs, especially in developing countries, could afford to come to Geneva to attend Committee meetings.

13. Mr. de GOUTTES said that he endorsed the proposals of Mr. Valencia Rodríguez.

14. Referring to the heavy burden of the preparatory work of the country rapporteur, who often had difficulty finding all the necessary information, he drew attention to paragraphs 35 to 37 of the document on the inter-Committee meeting on methods of work relating to the State reporting process, which explained that, in a number of other treaty bodies, the country rapporteurs obtained country analyses from the secretariat. The Committee should ask to be provided with such material by the secretariat; that would be a major contribution to its work.

15. With regard to the limitation on the length of reports and time limits for statements by delegations of State parties, he agreed with Mr. Valencia Rodríguez, but on no account must that be allowed to interfere with dialogue, which was an essential part of the Committee's work. Hence the need to present the proposal as a rationalization of work.

16. Concerning follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations, it would be useful to ask all States parties to devote part of their reports to replies to questions asked at the preceding session. A number of States had already done so, and the experience had been very positive.

17. It was unfortunate that early warning measures and urgent action procedures had been somewhat neglected of late. For example, the Committee had written to Liberia in 2001 expressing serious concern about the situation in the country and offering to send an expert to help implement the Convention. Liberia had failed to reply. That was a case for early warning measures and urgent action procedures; the Committee could send a reminder.

18. Mr. ABOUL-NASR said he agreed with the proposals that delegations should not depart from the issue of racial discrimination, that oral introductions must be limited to 30 minutes, although delegations must of course be informed of that requirement in advance, that the time limit should also apply to country rapporteurs and that 10 minutes' speaking time were sufficient for the other members, it being understood that they should not repeat any of the points raised by earlier speakers, unless they disagreed, and that they should not take the floor again and again. He did not think that reports should be limited to 50 pages because that was still too long; States parties should simply be encouraged to make the reports as short as possible. But it was unreasonable to bombard a delegation with as many as 100 questions and then expect its written replies to fit into 50 pages. The Committee must be flexible in that regard.

19. He agreed with the point made on early warning measures and emergency procedures. Information received from NGOs should be sent not only to the country rapporteur, but to all members. As the Committee asked States parties to consult with NGOs in preparing their reports, it should also request NGOs to send their reports to the States parties concerned. The secretariat should also forward such material.

20. A general debate at the beginning of each session would be much more useful than a meeting with a large number of NGOs for only one day. He was in favour of retaining the same procedure as currently used when considering country reports. The Anti-Racism Information Service (ARIS) was very helpful in that regard: at the meetings which it organized, the Committee could listen to the representatives of the NGOs concerned and start a discussion while the information and questions were still fresh. If that exercise was held on the first day, it

would be difficult two weeks later to remember what had been said. An initial general debate should give members the opportunity to express their views on the overall situation of racial discrimination in the world. The current session, for example, could have raised issues of international importance that were directly linked to the problem of racial discrimination. How could the Committee consider the situation in Liechtenstein and Moldova and not discuss the events in Afghanistan from the standpoint of racial discrimination? How could it fail to address questions of racial discrimination in connection with the accusations levelled against Iraq and Iran? An initial debate would attract the attention of the international community and the press to such important issues.

21. In addition, ARIS might have some ideas on how to deal with the problem of national NGOs which did not have the means to cooperate with the Committee.

22. Mr. RESHETOV said that he was very pleased with the information which the secretariat provided to the country rapporteurs and which was always given on time and in full. If the secretariat were to prepare written information for their use, many of the country rapporteurs, including Mr. de Gouttes himself, would no doubt still wish to refer to the sources of such material. As for the time allotted to the country rapporteur and to the delegation, there was no reason to be formalistic. The primary objective must, of course, be to ensure that a dialogue took place. Clearly, if the country rapporteur spoke for 30 minutes and the delegation for three hours, it would be a dialogue of the deaf. At the current session, the Chairman had taken the commendable initiative of limiting the time granted to speakers.

23. Years before, the Committee had taken some organizational decisions that had never been set out in writing. For instance, it had been decided that members should not act as country rapporteurs more than once for a given country and that they should not take the floor during the consideration of reports and concluding observations relating to their countries. He had opposed the latter rule, but thought that it should be applied because most Committee members still supported it. However, a question remained as to how Committee members should act when a situation was under discussion in a State neighbouring theirs, or in one with intermingled interests. Clearly, such circumstances called for wisdom and restraint on the part of Committee members.

24. He agreed with Mr. Aboul-Nasr that the nature of NGOs varied considerably. Some were highly politicized and represented certain interests, which could even sometimes coincide with those of foreign powers, while others, such as the Anti-Racism Information Service (ARIS), were highly professional and beyond reproach in their support of the Committee's work and implementation of the Convention. It was truly regrettable that the NGOs represented in the Committee were generally from the relatively affluent, European countries and that very few came from poor countries.

25. Mr. AMIR said that it was extremely important for the Committee regularly to carry out evaluations of the work it did at each session in order to ensure that its action was in keeping with the spirit of the Convention and the rules of procedure. It might be useful if the members of

the Committee had a calendar of the Committee's work not only for the session, but also for the year, as the inter-sessional period could include events of major importance. How did the Convention and the Committee's rules of procedure govern relations between Committee members and public opinion, including the right of members to write articles and commentary?

26. Mr. YUTZIS said that, in view of the complexity of the topic under discussion, the Committee should have a single background paper, which would include information on the practices of the other treaty bodies. It would thus be in a better position to consider the question point by point, for example, at its next session.

27. Mr. KJAERUM said that a 50-page limit was quite long and that it should be made clear to Governments that the Committee did not expect reports to be that lengthy. Country profiles prepared by the secretariat could be quite useful in providing country rapporteurs with general background material before they looked more deeply into the human rights situation in the countries concerned. It would be useful if the secretariat furnished Committee members with lists of key information sources and with more information from the various United Nations bodies.

28. The secretariat, in particular staff involved in technical assistance, could draw up a list of best practices for the follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations. In those concluding observations, it was inappropriate for the Committee to address the same issues in different ways and its approach therefore needed to be unified and streamlined. It was very important for the Committee not to exclude any NGOs, in particular international ones, from the consultations held on the first day of the session. In some cases, national human rights institutions had been incorporated in delegations and, in others, they had been treated similarly to NGOs. It was for the institutions themselves to decide whether they wished to take part as members of national delegations or preferred to speak to the Committee during the consultations with NGOs. In any event, the Committee must not exclude such bodies from its invitations. In the light of the financial constraints restricting participation by many NGOs from poorer countries, perhaps the secretariat could raise with certain donors the possibility of funding such participation. Lastly, he supported the proposal of Mr. Aboul-Nasr to hold thematic discussions at each session, as such discussions could do much to improve the Committee's concluding observations.

29. Mr. THORNBERRY asked what triggering conditions had to be met when the Committee decided to invoke the early warning measures and urgent action procedures and which standards and benchmarks applied. In 2000 and 2002, the Committee had received requests from NGOs that it should initiate such procedures, but those requests had simply not been taken up. Was it necessary to establish a working group for the screening of such requests? As for the length of the reports submitted by States parties, he felt the Committee must be somewhat flexible, especially in respect of initial reports, as more complete information might be welcome in such circumstances. The Committee should reserve an informal meeting or two at the beginning of the session for interaction with NGOs, with interpretation services, but without summary records.

30. The proposal that a general debate should be held at the opening of each session was useful. The subject of such a debate could be wide-ranging or the Committee members could agree on a general theme for discussion prior to the session. In any event, the subject must be related to the Convention. The materials provided by the secretariat to the country rapporteurs was of excellent quality, but a more extensive country profile might be helpful.

31. He was disappointed at the small number of cases brought before the Committee under article 14. Had the Committee ever conducted an analysis of the reason for the low take-up? He supported the proposal that States' replies to the Committee's concluding observations should be included in the body of the Committee's report. Lastly, the Committee should regularly discuss its working methods and, at the next session, should tackle the subject with a working document which would include action-oriented recommendations.

32. Mr. de GOUTTES asked the secretariat to inform the Committee about the practices of other treaty bodies in respect of the preparation of country profiles or analyses for their country rapporteurs. A few years earlier, the Committee had named members to act as liaisons with United Nations and regional bodies active in combating racial discrimination. The liaisons were supposed to keep the Committee informed of activities in the corresponding bodies. The Committee should decide whether that practice, which had not been kept up, should be revived.

33. Mr. TANG Chengyuan, noting that the periodic reports submitted to the Committee, were heterogeneous in nature, proposed that the secretariat might be able to help recast such reports in a more uniform style. Most reports were more than 50 pages long, particularly once the core document had been counted.

34. When a delegation was present, it was possible to engage in a constructive dialogue. However, it would be difficult to impose limitations on written replies submitted by States. There was no guarantee that States would observe such limitations and, even if they did, the dialogue might be hindered if the replies were too concise. With regard to early warning measures and urgent action procedures, he asked what the Committee could do in the event that a State refused to take action once such procedures had been initiated. As far as the participation of NGOs was concerned, it might be possible to accept only those that were international, as there would not be enough space to accommodate all the NGOs that wished to attend the Committee's sessions.

35. Mr. LINDGREN ALVES said that he wished to dispel any lingering doubts about the advisability of allowing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide the Committee with information at the beginning of each session. On the one hand, the Committee already used documentation from a wide variety of sources and, on the other, it could restrict its invitations to NGOs to which the Economic and Social Council had granted consultative status. The briefings could be formal or informal. They should not, however, be held during the lunch break, but at a time which enabled the Committee as a whole to attend. If one or one and a half days were set aside for such meetings, for which no summary records would be required, that would not prevent NGOs or groups of experts from holding further lunch-time get-togethers if they so wished. He considered arguments about the type of NGO which could be approached to be irrelevant, since national and international NGOs networked. A decision should be taken on the matter at the earliest opportunity.

36. Unlike Mr. Thornberry, he was not surprised that so few communications were received under article 14. There were many bodies within the United Nations system which dealt with communications and so petitioners preferred to submit their grievances to a political rather than a treaty body, because the former reacted faster. It should also be remembered that, despite all the confusion in the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the initiative to hold the Durban Conference had first come from the Sub-Commission.

37. Mr. SHAHI said that he endorsed the proposal that a worldwide review of racial discrimination should be held, especially in the light of the concerns which had been expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that some counter-terrorism legislation enacted by the leading democracies of the world in the wake of 11 September 2001 violated a number of fundamental human rights and which had been echoed by several United Nations special rapporteurs. Furthermore, the Millennium Declaration of the General Assembly had called for a dialogue of civilizations. Since many civilizations were grounded in religion and several wars were being waged ostensibly in the name of religion, that was a further reason for devoting one meeting to a discussion of the implementation of the Convention throughout the world.

38. He also agreed with the suggestion that one meeting at the beginning of each session should be devoted to a discussion with NGOs and that further briefings could be arranged when periodic reports were considered.

39. He supported Mr. de Gouttes' view that early warning and urgent action procedures were being neglected. In the past, the Committee had been very active in considering situations in which the threat of genocide was imminent, but, in the case of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, despite all the warnings the Committee had received, it had not referred the matter to the Security Council and the international community had failed dismally to bestir itself to prevent the subsequent slaughter. The Durban Conference had totally ignored the lessons to be learnt from mistakes in the past and it was therefore no wonder that so little store was set by early warning and urgent action procedures.

40. Mr. RESHETOV, referring to the question of the attitude the Committee should adopt towards the mass media, said that the members of the Committee should use all the resources at their disposal to champion the goals of the Convention, both in their own countries and on the international scene. He had written an article in the Moscow Journal of International Law in which he had suggested that the Committee had received few communications from individuals in the former Soviet Union because the general public was unaware of the disastrous situation in respect of the implementation of the Convention.

41. He was in favour of devoting one thematic discussion to the dialogue of civilizations because that dialogue had a direct bearing on the implementation of the Convention.

42. Mr. HERNDL said that, notwithstanding the need for a review of racial discrimination throughout the world and for a dialogue of civilizations, the Committee should be mindful of its limited resources when it discussed its methods of work. From that point of view, it would be useful to prescribe a standard length for reports, although it would be impossible to enforce any restrictions. In the past, an attempt had been made to impose a 24-page limit on all United Nations documents, but it had been abandoned in the face of bitter complaints from Governments. He was in favour of country profiles, but pointed out that they would place a huge burden on the secretariat.

43. He was optimistic that greater use would ultimately be made of article 14 procedures. From his experience, it took a long time for individuals to find out about the possibility of submitting petitions to international bodies. Once lawyers realized that such complaints were a potential source of additional income, communications would come streaming in.

44. The style and format of the Committee's concluding observations naturally depended on the actual debate and some would naturally be more detailed than others. They would always contain issues that needed to be addressed and, in any event, they would be thoroughly discussed in the Committee. Flexibility and stable criteria were therefore required.

45. If written replies were received from Governments, they should be incorporated in the annual report. There was a precedent for doing so because that method had been followed by other committees in the past. He believed that NGO briefings were a good idea and NGOs should therefore be invited to a formal meeting.

46. Mr. PILLAI said that constructive dialogue with States parties began with interaction with the Committee. He had noted that delegations' responses to issues raised by members of the Committee varied enormously and a procedure should therefore be introduced for formulating questions and sending them to countries before they submitted their reports, so that they at least had an opportunity to furnish an adequate reply.

47. He agreed with Mr. Thornberry's comments on the early warning procedure and, in that context, he wondered what had happened to the case referred to in the petition submitted to the Committee by an NGO group prior to the consideration of the report of the United States of America. Clear-cut procedures and guidelines were necessary so that the Committee could deal effectively with any petitions that might be submitted in the future.

48. Turning to the question of the length of reports, he said that he doubted whether States parties would be able to abide by the limits set in the draft recommendation (CERD/C/60/Misc.39), which was, in any case, too terse and peremptory in tone; it should also explain what sort of information the report should contain.

49. It would be useful to hold a review of current ethnic issues at the global level, but more time was needed to study how to associate NGOs more fruitfully with the Committee's deliberations.

50. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that, if the methods of work under discussion were to be formalized, they should be translated into guidelines or clear recommendations to States parties. He therefore asked Mr. Valencia Rodríguez whether the existing guidelines should be amended or whether new ones should be drafted and what recommendations should be addressed to States parties. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had called for a discussion of the length of the reports of States parties and that was why he had drafted a recommendation on the subject (CERD/C/60/Misc.39). In his opinion, 20 pages were sufficient for an updating report, but, of course, no report would be refused if it were longer. It was, however, necessary to issue some sort of recommendation otherwise, States parties would have too much latitude. The Committee should therefore reach a decision on the subject.

51. The Committee should also decide now whether it was going to request a meeting in New York so that it would not be too late to arrange a session there in 2003. Many of the other procedures suggested by members would take up time that could otherwise be devoted to the consideration of reports. If the Committee spent a morning on an NGO briefing and held a general debate lasting for a whole afternoon, it would have to forego the examination of one country's report.

52. Country profiles were a good idea, but they would have to be restricted to issues which came within the Committee's mandate. He was not in favour of country analyses, however, because it would be better for the Committee to reach its own conclusions.

53. Mr. YUTZIS said that all the points discussed should be summarized in an orderly fashion in one document in order to give the members of the Committee time to think about them, with a view to analysing each question at the next session.

54. Mr. ABOUL-NASR, referring to Mr. Reshetov's comments, said that the Committee had never formally decided that Committee members should not take part in the discussion of their own countries' reports. There was merely an understanding among Committee members to that effect.

55. As for the dwindling number of communications received by the Committee, the procedure under article 14 was not only complicated, but also entailed costs for complainants in the form of lawyers' fees. If a communication was deemed admissible and a relevant decision was adopted, moreover, it would be the subject of a few lines in the Committee's annual report to the United Nations General Assembly. It was clearly simpler and more effective for complainants to go through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which would bring complaints to the Committee's attention in connection with the reports of States parties considered in public meetings. He agreed with Mr. Yutzis that there was little point in issuing separate reporting guidelines to States parties; that would merely cause confusion. The best approach would be for Mr. Valencia Rodríguez to revise the current guidelines and to produce one single document, taking into account the Committee's earlier decisions and remarks made during the present discussion.

56. Mr. BOSSUYT, referring to the Chairman's proposals, said that he agreed on the need to reduce the length of States parties' reports, since some of the ones received in recent years had been over 100 pages long. For practical reasons, the maximum number of pages for full periodic reports should be a figure divisible by four, namely, 32 pages. A maximum of 20 pages for updating reports was acceptable.

57. He was not in favour of the Committee holding its sessions in New York rather than in Geneva, but was aware of the views of other Committee members in that regard and would not stand in the way of consensus. He nonetheless stated his preference for holding a session in New York in August 2003 rather than March 2003.

58. Mr. KJAERUM said that one third of communications received by the Committee under the article 14 procedure were submitted by Denmark. The reason was not that there were more grounds for complaints of racial discrimination in that country, but that there was a very active

NGO community, which had made great efforts to familiarize the general public and the judiciary with the procedure. For instance, Committee members had been invited to Denmark to provide training to lawyers and to participate in public hearings in connection with the reports of States parties. The secretariat should look into ways of improving the situation, including by exchanging information among States parties on best practices.

59. The CHAIRMAN said that he been invited to make a presentation at a meeting of the Commission on Human Rights. Special identification badges had also been provided for three other Committee members; volunteers were invited to contact the secretariat. He and two Committee members could also participate in the inter-Committee meeting. Since one of the subjects dealt with at that meeting would be working methods in connection with the Durban Conference, he would like Mr. Valencia Rodríguez, the Chairman of the working group on the working methods of the Committee, to accompany him. Mr. Aboul-Nasr had also signalled his interest in attending the meeting. Lastly, he asked whether the Committee was ready to adopt the draft recommendation on the length of reports at the current meeting or whether it preferred the matter to be deferred.

60. Mr. ABOUL-NASR asked whether the draft recommendation on the length of reports was really necessary since the Committee had already agreed to revise its reporting guidelines. Was the intention that the recommendation would be sent to States parties separately or would it form part of the Committee's annual report?

61. The CHAIRMAN said that it would be incorporated in the annual report. In the meantime, however, the Committee would also have to reply to the High Commissioner's letter on the subject and to take a stance at the inter-Committee meeting, during which the matter was likely to come up. As he would be speaking on the Committee's behalf at that meeting, he would like to know the members' views beforehand.

62. Mr. BOSSUYT said that the Committee should take a decision on the length of State party reports at the current session. It would take up to two years to implement such a decision, bearing in mind that all the reports to be considered during the next session had already been submitted to the secretariat. He therefore proposed that the draft recommendation should refer to "future reports" rather than to "reports" in general and that the maximum number of pages for periodic reports should be 32 instead of 30.

63. Mr. HERNDL said that, in response to the High Commissioner, the Committee should do no more than state its intention to inform States parties about the need to reduce the length of their reports. It seemed premature to adopt the draft recommendation, which, quite frankly, needed considerable redrafting. For instance, it would be more appropriate to suggest a standard or average length rather than requesting States parties to limit the length of their reports. The Committee should give more valid reasons for its request, which could be reasons of economy or the need to streamline discussion, but not to strengthen the functioning of the Committee. He endorsed Mr. Bossuyt's proposal on the maximum number of pages for periodic reports.

64. Mr. AMIR said that it was not the quantity, but the quality of reports that mattered. Perhaps it might be useful to provide guidance on how the required information should be distributed in 20 or 32 pages.

65. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would resume its discussion of the draft recommendation at the following meeting.

66. He invited Mr. David, Secretary of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to provide information on the working methods of the Committee and, in particular, on its country analyses.

67. Mr. DAVID (Secretary, Committee on the Rights of the Child) said that, at its inaugural meeting, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had adopted a decision requesting its secretariat to provide country analyses for all States parties whose reports were to be considered. The format and contents of those analyses had changed considerably over the years, but the analyses had always been for internal use only and were thus subject to restricted distribution. Their average length was 30 pages and they were available in English only.

68. Nowadays, the analyses consisted of three main parts. The first page gave a brief summary of the contents and thus the main issues to be taken up by the Committee. The remainder of the first part provided information on the status of ratification of relevant international instruments, the history, economy and political situation of the State party and international cooperation, including relevant projects under way. The second part gave an overview of the general human rights situation in the State party and the third part provided a detailed analysis of the situation with regard to the rights of the child. The advantage of such reports was that they provided a clear analysis of the main issues to be taken up with the State party during the dialogue, including progress on the implementation of the Convention and specific concerns. They also greatly facilitated the drafting of concluding observations and the assessment of whether the Committee's recommendations with respect to previous periodic reports had been duly followed up.

69. Mr. de GOUTTES said that he could see how useful country analyses were, but wished to know whether the Committee's own secretariat would be able to take on what was clearly a very time-consuming task.

70. Ms. PROUVEZ (Secretary of the Committee) said that she would need to look into the matter, but doubted whether the secretariat currently had the capacity to carry out such work.

71. Mr. HERNDL said that he would welcome more information on the average costs incurred, time required and staff responsible for the preparation of country analyses.

72. Mr. ABOUL-NASR asked whether country analyses were really of practical use to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its work.

73. Mr. KJAERUM said that the Committee was the only treaty monitoring body which was not provided with country analyses. Surely some of the general information contained in those analyses would be found useful by the Committee. The secretariat might be able to use it as the basis for preparing its own country analyses. Was there any system of exchanging information among the different treaty bodies so as to avoid duplication of efforts?

74. Mr. PILLAI, noting that more countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child than the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, asked whether the use of country analyses had helped the Committee on the Rights of the Child expedite its consideration of States parties' reports.

75. Mr. DAVID (Secretary, Committee on the Rights of the Child) said that, with seven full-time professionals, the Committee now had the largest secretariat among the treaty monitoring bodies in Geneva. It took approximately three weeks to prepare a country analysis and the draft list of issues, which were always considered jointly by the Committee. For obvious reasons, the staff members responsible for preparing the analyses tended to specialize in different groups of countries or regions with a similar political background or human rights situation. A country analysis must be a practical tool which was easy to use. Some parts of the country analyses would be recycled: the section on the general human rights situation was available for use by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as a whole.

76. Two years previously, the Committee had increased the number of reports considered per session from six to nine and had been provided with the necessary additional staff for that purpose. The country analyses had helped to speed up the pace of the Committee's work, although it was currently almost two years behind schedule, with a backlog of approximately 60 reports of States parties. The inter-Committee meeting would be a good forum for an exchange of views on such matters.

77. The CHAIRMAN said that there were differences between the working methods of the two Committees. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination did not have a backlog to speak of. It considered the situation in 30 States parties each year: around 25 States parties submitted reports; the rest were considered as non-reporting countries. It examined more reports than the Committee on the Rights of the Child, where States parties were obliged to submit reports only every four years instead of every two years. The Committee met for only six weeks per year, whereas the Committee on the Rights of the Child held sessions lasting three months.

78. In conclusion, he said that the Committee would continue its discussion on working methods at the next meeting. He hoped that it would be able to reach agreement on the draft recommendation relating to the length of reports and the draft decision concerning the holding of its sixty-third session in New York in preparation for the forthcoming meeting of chairpersons of the treaty bodies and the inter-Committee meeting. In the absence of any firm decision on such matters, he would merely outline the Committee's general views, but would not assume any binding obligations without consulting it beforehand.

The meeting rose at 6.00 p.m.